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AUTHOR Rhodes, Lodis
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ABSTRACT

Public concern for children has become more visible during the last decade as awareness of child abuse and neglect has increased. It is difficult to design policies to deal with troubled youth who run away. Because families of runaways are often looked upon as failures, there is a reluctance among families to report the runaway. Families may not define leaving home without permission as runaway behavior. Statistical estimates of runaways are difficult because of timing of the estimates, survey bias, and political trends. This study attempted to estimate the number of runaways and determine the type of services they and their families receive in Texas. A questionnaire was completed by 1,022 Texas households having children between the ages of 10 and 17. Respondents provided demographic, runaway, and social service information. The results showed that approximately two percent of the households (N=19) reported a runaway incident. Racial percentages of runaways resembled the state's racial composition. The median income of families reporting runaways was higher than the state average, suggesting that the poorest families were not necessarily experiencing the most runaway behavior. The survey did not generate information about the need for new services for runaways and their families. Several types of youth can be classified as runaways. Some children leave home of their own choosing, others are asked to leave by their parents, and others leave to escape abuse or neglect. A general survey on runaways will not reveal these different populations or their respective needs for services. The survey questionnaire and tables of results are included. (ABL)

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Runaways in Texas: A Statistical Estimate, 1985

Lodis Rhodes

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Special Project Report

Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs
The University of Texas at Austin

1985

Runaways in Texas:
A Statistical Estimate, 1985

Prepared for the Texas Department of Human Resources

by

Lodis Rhodes

This research was supported in part by a grant from the Texas Department of Human Resources

Special Project Report
Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs
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1 PREFACE

The conclusions in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Human Resources or the University of Texas. I would like to thank Joe Papick, Tommy Chapmond, and Pam Coleman of the Protective Services to Families and Children Division of the Texas Department of Human Resources for their help during the course of the research discussed in this report. The following graduate students in the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs helped design and conduct the survey and drafted a preliminary report which discussed the results of that survey:

Michael Burke

Wanda Malone

Elizabeth Marquez

Lucy Morell

Norah Schwartz

Rebecca Weader

2 FACT SHEET

- An estimated 91,000[1] Texas households had a youngster between the ages 10-17 absent from home without permission of a parent or legal guardian for at least one night during 1984.

- This represents 1.86 percent of the 4,929,267 residential households in Texas.[2]

1980 TEXAS POPULATION AND HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS *

STATEWIDE POPULATION		Percent
Total	14,229,191	***
Female	7,231,263	50.82
Male	6,997,928	49.18
Children 10-17	1,977,113	13.89
RACE		
White	9,370,023	65.85
Black	1,688,947	11.87
Hispanic	2,982,583	20.96
Asian	171,741	1.21
Others	123,247	0.87
POPULATION IN HOUSEHOLDS	13,887,703	97.60
PERSONS PER HOUSEHOLD	2.88	***
NUMBER OF FAMILIES	3,677,865	***
with children 10-17	1,461,601	39.74
RESIDENTS IN URBAN AREAS		79.64
RESIDENTS IN RURAL AREAS		20.36
MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME	$19,618	***

*Source: 1980 U.S. Census

3 INTRODUCTION

The results of a statewide survey of 2750 Texas households indicate that an estimated 91,000 youngsters between the ages 10-17 were away from home for at least one night in 1984 without permission of their parent(s) or legal guardian. Where did these youngsters go? Why did they leave home without permission? How many of the estimated absences represent troubled youth who ran away from home and who may or may not have returned to their families? These are a few of the questions raised by the research the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs completed for the Texas Department of Human Resources. Such questions also concern those who design and manage social service programs that help children and their families.

The research reported on here is one part of a comprehensive demonstration project planned by the Texas Department of Human Resources to determine how many children run away from home, to help families with problems that may be indicated by the runaway behavior of their children, and to better protect children from abuse and neglect.

3.1 Families and Children: The Public Policy

Children command special attention in our social conscience. The attention has always resulted in an ambivalent blend of goodwill and authority. The goodwill is intended to help children fully develop their individual potentials; the authority restrains and controls children by requiring others (adults) to make decisions for them. The ambivalence exists within families through disagreements between parents and their children and in the political domain through often contradictory public policies that affect children and families. The conflicting policies are

implemented through an array of social institutions like schools and law enforcement agencies that simultaneously seek to help children develop and become more "adultlike" while controlling their behavior by denying many adult responsibilities and rights.

Public concern for children has become more visible during the last decade as we have been made more aware of child abuse and neglect. The increased visibility has swung the pendulum of concern from viewing a troubled youth as a potential victimizer who must be controlled to viewing children as potential and actual victims of abuse or neglect who need help. The shift in focus now extends to youth who run away from home or are habitually truant from school.

It has been particularly difficult to fashion policy and programs to help troubled youth who run away from home. There are several reasons for the difficulty. First, no one really knows the scope of the problem because runaway behavior is an essentially invisible activity to all but the family experiencing it. When a youngster runs away from home, a general though often inaccurate presumption is that the family is failing in its child rearing responsibilities. Most families want to avoid being viewed as a failure and, therefore, are reluctant to report to an official that a child has run away from home. If they do admit there is a problem within the family, they often interpret that problem differently than would a social service agency; they do not necessarily define a child's absence from home without permission as runaway behavior. The differences of opinion between some families and service agencies about what is runaway behavior and the priorities different agencies place on serving runaways

and their families make it difficult to achieve high levels of statistical precision when estimating the number of children who run away from home and who among them want or need outside help.

A related problem with statistical estimates is interpreting what the estimate means. A statistical estimate is at best only a one dimensional snapshot in time of the runaway problem. This tends to limit the appropriate use of estimates to suggesting the relative size of the runaway population at one point in time that can be compared with a different snapshot taken at another time. Statistical estimates cannot reveal the actual number of runaways at either point in time; what the comparison can tell is the magnitude of the problem and the direction of trends in the runaway population -- a larger, smaller, or stable percentage of some meaningful unit of measurement like an age cohort or households.

A degree of bias is built into all research designed to count runaways because of the ambiguous nature of runaway behavior. Two approaches typically have been used to count (estimate) the number of youngsters who run away home. One is for a researcher to use primary or first-hand sources of information to gather data about the phenomenon being studied; the other is to get data from secondary sources of information. In the first case a researcher would "talk" directly with families about runaway behavior they may have experienced. In the second approach a researcher might gather data from administrative records or ask for the opinions of staff members in agencies such as police departments, schools, and social welfare programs who come into contact with runaways and might know something about runaways and their families.

Research techniques that rely on primary or secondary sources of information for data produce equally valid pictures of runaway behavior. However, it is important to recognize that the pictures developed from each source of information give different views of the same phenomenon. In the case of runaways and their families, one is the perspective of families experiencing the problem; the other gives an agency view of the same problem. The picture are not the same primarily because families that come into contact with social agencies are not representative of all families. The practical problem for the researcher who uses both approaches is interpreting what the data means from each source. For example, a researcher is never sure if he or she is looking at the same type of families at different times or whether the pictures are of different types of families experiencing the same type of problem. Our hunch is that it is the latter.

The negative image of families with children who run away from home and the resulting hesitancy of families to openly discuss runaway episodes, as well as the inconsistent way social service agencies define runaway behavior, translate into specific but different types of research error. Some errors are common to both primary and secondary sources of data. Most research methods use aggregate data; the necessary caution in interpreting aggregate data is that the totals derived from them tell very little about specific families or the precise number of runaways at a given point in time.

A different problem that distorts research findings about runaways is more political than scientific in nature. Child abuse, neglect, and runaway

behavior are for the moment highly publicized and emotionally charged issues, although relatively few families experience the problems. However, the relatively few cases easily command center stage in most forums where the issue is discussed. This means that research results must be introduced into forums where there is usually more emotional smoke than factual light generated about what is for a relatively small proportion of all families a truly serious problem. It also means that it is easier for public officials to fall into the trap of symbolic rather than substantive actions to solve problems. For example, it is easier for an elected official to vote to appoint a committee to study a problem or to pass laws to stiffen penalties for those who abuse and neglect children than it is to vote to spend more money for agencies which must help families or to accept that most child abusers (physical and sexual) are familiy members and not strangers. In the first instance the dilemma revolves around developing the political will to pay more for social services and deciding who should pay; in the second instance the dilemma is realizing that the "get tough" policies directed at child abusers usually mean arresting and prosecuting a family member. Needless to say, well-intentioned "get tough" policies are as likely to further traumatize a family and its children as they are to protect those children. The dilemmas are real and not easily resolved.

Another political aspect of conducting research on this problem is that the relatively low incidence of runaway behavior makes it very expensive and not politically palatable for elected officials to authorize and appropriate enough money to gather the type and amount of data needed to answer the questions they have about the problem. This combination of scientific and political obstacles makes it very difficult to design

convenient, cost-effective ways to overcome the research errors built into the statistical techniques used to collect data directly from families.

3.2 Previous Research: Federal and State

Federal, state, and local governments have responded in many ways to the understandably loud and emotional cry to "do something" about the plight of abused and neglected children. The federal government responded in 1973 by amending the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. Title III of that Act set up the National Runaway Youth Program. This federal policy also fueled research efforts to determine the number of children who run away from home. The Behavioral Research and Evaluation Corporation of Boulder Colorado conducted one of the early nationwide studies. In 1975 it estimated that 1.8 percent of youngsters 10-17 years old run away from home at least once. As part of the continuing federal concern with the problem, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare contracted with the Opinion Research Corporation to a conduct a similar national study of runaway youth. The 1976 nationwide household-survey estimated that 1.7 to 2 percent of children between the ages of 10 and 17 run away from home. The percentage represented 519,000-635,000 children at that time.

Texas state policy on runaways and other status offenders was first outlined in 1973 in the Texas Family Code. Titles 2 and 3 of the Code define status offenses and include runaway behavior as one. The titles also make the Department of Human Resources, the Texas Youth Commission, and juvenile probation services responsible for providing social and therapeutic services to status offenders and their families. Not surprisingly, policy is not self-executing. It has been difficult for the

three service networks as well as child and family advocates to agree about who should provide what type of service to runaways and their families. As a result, runaways and their families often do not receive services because they are not in an agency's high priority group, they do not meet eligibility criteria of a given agency, or there are no service agencies in their communities providing the services they need.

In what has become a continuing effort to deal more effectively with the problems of status offenders, the 68th Texas Legislature appropriated $3.9 million in 1983 for a Runaway and Truant Demonstration Project. The Legislature assigned the project to the Department of Human Resources. DHR was charged with providing financial assistance to local communities to help them develop innovative services for runaway and truant youth and their families. A second objective of the project was to estimate the number of runaway and truant youth in Texas and determine their need for services.

3.3 DHR: Counting Runaways in Texas

The Texas Department of Human Resources conducted a study in the summer of 1984 as the first step to eventually estimate the number of runaways in the state and to determine the type and degree of services runaways and their families receive in Texas. Data were collected from service agencies in selected counties. The agencies included the Department of Human Resources, public school systems, law enforcement agencies, and the juvenile probation system. Agencies were asked to do three things: provide administrative data on routine documented runaway incidents, estimate the number of unreported runaways in the county, and analyze current services and the need for additional services in their

county. The results yielded a broad range of estimates from the various agencies. Some estimates were clearly inaccurate because they exceeded the total population aged 10-17 in a given county. DHR could not and should not attempt to estimate a statewide runaway population based on administrative data. However, administrative data from social agencies provide important information about the priorities of each agency and their internal operations.

A general problem with using administrative records to gather data on runaway behavior revolves around how agencies define a runaway. The most frequently used definition is a child between the ages of 10 and 17 who is away from home for 24 hours without permission. Despite this general definition, service agencies view a child's absence from home in different ways. This means that the label "runaway" when viewed across agencies represents a range of behaviors and lengths of time a youngster can be away from home. The fact that social agencies apply the runaway label in different ways usually reflects the different priorities runaway youth and their families have among the competing claims made by all the clients eligible to be served by a given agency. For example, children 10-17 are not necessarily priority clients for Department of Human Resources services, although they are a high priority within the Protective Services Division. Unless the runaway is in immediate physical danger or has been abused, DHR may not be able to help that youngster because other types of client are a higher priority to receive DHR services.

Law enforcement and juvenile probation agencies do not approach the problem of runaways in the same way DHR or welfare-type agencies do. The

major concern of law enforcement agencies is to control runaway behavior and to protect society. Law enforcement agencies have minimal contact with runaways; they generally only attempt to find youngsters who run away if there is reason to suspect foul play or that the youngster has committed a crime. Often, a child who turns out to be a runaway was taken into custody by police for a more serious offense such as theft. In such instances, the runaway offense is not likely to be officially recorded. It suggests that data on runaways taken from the administrative records of law enforcement agencies may undercount the number of individual youngsters processed by the agency who have run away from home. Undercounts may also result from the on-street practice of police officers, who often counsel and try to persuade a runaway to return home. If successful, the officer need not detain the youngster or file a written report on the incident. Obviously, law enforcement agencies as well as juvenile probation departments must be more concerned with controlling troubled and troublesome youngsters than they can be with trying to solve more comprehensive and involved family problems.

In 1983 the Texas Department of Public Safety reported 17,852 arrests or apprehensions of runaways. Juvenile Probation reported 11,183 referrals for runaways in 1983. The DPS statistics count only those runaway youths who are apprehended by law enforcement agencies; many runaways never come into contact with the police. Moreover, the same youth may run away and be apprehended several times. Juvenile probation statistics reflect only those runaway youths who are referred to juvenile probation. Not all runaway youths are referred to juvenile probation and not all those who are referred are counted as runaways. Runaways may be referred for more serious offenses.

Another source of information on the number of runaways is the social service network that provides emergency shelter and counseling services to runaways. The program staff of the Runaway and Truant Demonstration Project compiled summary statistics on the client populations served by the contract providers for the Runaway and Truant Demonstration Project in 1983 and 1984. In 1983, the year before the demonstration programs were operating, the twelve contract agencies reported serving 3178 runaway youths. The following year, 1984, the agencies were asked to complete the Information Collection and Research Evaluation Form (ICARE) to provide a profile of the client population being served. Statistics were compiled in March/April of 1984 for the clients served in the first quarter of 1984. Fourteen programs funded by the Runaway and Truant Demonstration project served 579 youths in the first quarter of 1984.

The data gathered during the summer of 1984 from agencies and the twelve programs operating demonstration projects for DHR were not intended to produce a statewide estimate of runaways. Moreover, they could not even had that been the intent. There are several reasons why the results could not be used for such an estimate. First, the agencies collect data only on the runaways they actually come into contact with; not all runaways are apprehended by the police or receive services from the other agencies. Responses from the agencies indicated a lack of consistency in the definition of runaway. For example, some police departments only recorded a runaway after several incidents. Others only investigate runaway reports after the child has been gone for thirty days. Some agencies kept few records on runaways as much of the contact was informal. There was no uniform procedure for (r)porting and handling runaways. A survey that

depends on social service agencies is also affected by overlapping jurisdictions and gaps in jurisdictions. Also, individual runaways are often counted by more than one agency.

This short discussion of problems associated with secondary analysis of administrative data on runaways and the political context enveloping those who must "do something" about runaways illustrates the difficulty of trying to count the number of runaways in the state.

4 METHODOLOGY

The Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs research team conducted a statewide household survey to estimate the number of runaways in Texas.

A. Unit of Analysis

We define our universe as all residential households in Texas. The sample population is all residential households in Texas accounted for through publicly available address and phone lists. We chose households as the unit of analysis because we were trying to contact families; residential households are used as a proxy for families. We also chose households because they can provide the most valid information on when a family considers itself as having a problem with runaway behavior, as opposed to the second-hand information provided by social service agencies to describe runaway behavior. Finally, although our interest lies with those households having children between 10-17, address and phone lists are not available by type of family.

B. Research Design

We chose to conduct a stratified random sample of households. The sample was stratified by DHR service regions and degree of urbanization as defined by census data. Although we had DHR population projections for 1985, we wanted to use a more comprehensive set of demographic and household characteristics than the numbers represented by the projections. We, therefore, used 1980 census data because DHR numbers are merely trend projections of 1980 census data and they did not include other demographic and household data we needed. Moreover, we were more concerned in our research with using a replicable technique which would give us a valid ratio rather than an absolute number of questionable validity. The advantage of having a valid ratio is that it produces a percentage that can then be applied to future population projections. The importance of the ratio and resulting percentage is obvious when one realizes that policymakers are often more interested in whether a problem is getting better or worse than they are in knowing how bad the problem is at a given moment. In other words, we wanted to know the percentage of youngsters who run away rather than the absolute number.

The household sample included 3500 residential households. This is 1/2 of 1 percent of residential households in Texas. Originally, we planned to conduct a 750-sample phone interview and a separate mail survey of 2750 households. We wanted to compare the results of the two surveys as an additional test of the reliability of our survey instrument and the response rates from phone and mail surveys. However, the cost of conducting two surveys -- in terms of both time and money -- was prohibitive. We decided to conduct only the mail survey of 2750 households. Despite the apparent advantages to us of a mail survey, we

knew it would not necessarily produce more accurate answers to our questions than a phone survey. A mail survey, for example, does not provide an opportunity to clarify questions or probe for additional, useful information. It also may eliminate responses from people with little education or from those who are not fluent in English, since a Spanish version was not included due to cost. We chose to conduct the mail survey because we could reach more households and thereby generate a larger number of usable questionnaires with the same amount of money and time than we could obtain with the phone survey. Given our primary objective of producing a valid percentage that could be applied to future population projections, we needed the larger number of completed, usableq questionnaires that the mail survey would generate. The trade-off in using the mail survey rather than phone interviews was achieving a larger sample size rather than being able to probe for information in interesting but tangential areas.

A pilot study of 100 households in Travis County also suggested that a mail survey might make it easier for respondents to answer our questions and, thus, to complete and return the questionnaire. We used a pilot study to test the questionnaire and our methodology. The specific objectives of the pilot survey were to test the length of the questionnaire, identify problem questions, and gauge the usefulness of residential phone books. We also wanted to see how responsive people were to the questionnaire, how many working numbers we could contact through the phone book, and what types of households we could reach through the phone book. We chose 250 residential phone numbers from the 1983-1984 Austin telephone book, two and a half times the number of surveys we wanted to complete in the pilot test.

The phone numbers were drawn by selecting the first number at random and then selecting another number at a set interval until 250 numbers had been drawn. We completed 100 interviews and found no runaways.

C. Questionnaire

The questionnaire had three parts. The first was designed to get descriptive information about the responding household -- race, income, number of people living in the household. The second part asked whether a child between 10 to 17 had left home overnight without permission in the past 12 months. We defined "runaway" as a youngster who was away from home overnight without permission. This definition was arrived at through consulting other surveys and legal definitions. The questionnaire then asked for information about the runaway child and the runaway incident (age, sex, duration, number of times). The third section asked for information about social services or agencies the family may have asked for help. The last question asked for opinions or suggestions about services the family felt would have been helpful; it was the only question to ask for an opinion rather than a fact.

The questionnaire was designed to be answered by an adult member of the household, presumably a parent, and to elicit factual information rather than opinions and attitudes about runaway behavior.

Samples of the cover letters and the questionnaire which we used are in the Appendix.

D. Sampling Procedures

All names and addresses used for our survey were furnished by Survey Sampling, Inc of Westport, Connecticut. Survey Sampling supplied a random sample of 2750 Texas households and a stratified random sample of 750 households from 30 Texas counties. The company's procedure consists of randomly drawing names and address from the most current telephone directories. Survey Sampling guarantees that at least 70 percent of phone numbers in the samples are working, residential numbers in designated geographic areas of the state.

E. Research Procedure

Each survey was mailed with a cover letter which explained the purpose of the survey and asked each recipient to complete and return the questionnaire in the enclosed stamped, self-addressed return envelope. The 2750 surveys were mailed January 4, 1985; a second survey packet was mailed on January 31 to those households that had not returned the the first questionnaire. A total of 1022 usable questionnaires were returned. The 1022 questionnaires represented 38 percent of the households surveyed, a low return rate by most survey standards. An additional 21 questionnaires were returned but contained incomplete or inaccurate responses; 35 packets were returned by the postal service and marked as nondeliverable.

5 ANALYSIS OF DATA

A. Characteristics of the Respondents

Respondents differed somewhat as a group from the Texas population. The differences were not significant. The income of those responding was $9000-20000; the median family income for the state was $19,618. Fifty-

four percent of respondents lived in a 1-2 person household; the average for the state was 2.88 persons per household. Twenty-eight percent of the respondents (283/1022) had children between the ages of 10-17 living in their households. The racial and ethnic characteristics of the sample overrepresented whites and underrepresented blacks and Hispanics.

The small number of reported runaway cases in our sample meant that we could not run meaningful tests of significance comparing that group with households (families with children) that did not report runaways.

B. Detailed Results of Runaway Surveys

Of 1022 usable surveys, 19 households reported a runaway child. This represents 1.85 percent of the households responding to our survey. The percentage is close to the frequency-of-occurrence we expected based on the results of national surveys. We initially estimated that 2-5 percent of Texas residential households would report problems with runaway behavior. Although we were especially interested in families that had children 10-17, we had to calculate our estimate on residential households because that was the unit of analysis in the research design and, thus, the only statistically valid basis for an estimate.

Of the 19 respondents who reported experiencing runaway behavior, 16, or 84 percent, lived in households of 3-5 members. The race/ethnicity followed the state's percentages closely---68 percent white, 21 percent Hispanic, and 5.2 percent black (the black respondents were slightly underrepresented). Median income was higher than for the state average with 36.8 percent having family incomes over $40,000; 26.3 percent

$20,000-30,000 per year; and the same percentage with incomes below $20,000. This suggests that the poorest families are not necessarily those experiencing the most cases of runaway behavior. Seventy-four (73.6) percent of the runaways lived with natural or step-parents; 10.5 percent with legal guardians; and 15.5 percent of households did not answer the question. The marital status of those completing the survey showed 52.6 percent of reported runaways were from households with two parents present; 26 percent were from households where the parents were divorced.

Fifty-three percent of runaways were male; 37 percentage were female; 10 percent of respondents did not answer the question. Most runaways were between 14-17 (57 percent). The frequency of runaway behavior for the 19 runaways was 36.8 percent running away once, 26.3 percent running away 2-4 times, and 26.3 percent running away more than 6 times. Fifteen out of the nineteen runaways returned home (78.9 percent); two did not; two respondents did not answer the questions. When asked if parents considered that the child had run away, 42.1 percent said they did; 42.1 percent said they did not; and 15 percent either did not know or did not repond to the question.

The survey results did not shed new light on the services which need to be in place to meet the needs of runaways and their families. When asked if the child used the services of an agency when away from home, fifteen of the respondents with runaways stated that the child did not ask for help. Forty-seven percent of the respondents stated that they also did not ask for help. Of the 53.7 percent of respondents who did seek help, 10.5 percent used counseling services and 26.3 percent used law enforcement

services. Of those who used services, 21 percent felt the services were not very helpful and 15.7 felt they were somewhat helpful. After the child returned home, 21 percent of the families did seek family counseling and 5.26 percent received help from legal services. Twenty-one percent of these stated the services were somewhat helpful; 5.2 percent stated they were not helpful.

Respondents were asked if there were any services which they felt could have helped their families with the runaway. More than half (52.6 percent) chose not to respond to that question; 31.5 percent no and 15.7 percent said yes.

It should be noted that questions 13-17 of the survey had higher rates of "no reponse" than the other questions. We did not speculate about reasons for the higher rates.

6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

We started our research with the intent of trying to answer the following questions:

1. How many children between the ages of 10 and 17 run away each year in Texas?
2. Age/sex distribution of runaways?
3. Race/income/size of household?
4. Family structure?
5. Use of services?
6. Satisfaction with services?
7. Length of runaway incident?
8. Number of incidents?

9. Need for services?

However, for reasons that were discussed in this report earlier, it became obvious that we would have to settle for answers to a much shorter list of questions. Our most realistic expectation was to produce statistically valid observations about the magnitude and frequency of runaway behavior in Texas. The research accomplished that goal.

This survey differs from DHR's previous research about runaways in that it was based on data gathered directly from a random sample of residential households in Texas rather than a social service agency. We were also less concerned with specific types of services or the agencies that served runaways and their families. We wanted some measure of the overall incidence of runaway behavior in the state. This is related to but different from determining the number of runaways served by agencies. As a consequence, it was too limited to answer all the questions outlined above. However, it did provide enough valid data to indicate approximately how many youth run away from home and how often they do it. The survey also confirmed what we suspected before we began the work: there are clearly far more youth in Texas who run away from home than there is a state capacity to help them and their families. This is not to say that all youth who run away from home or their families want or need help, but those who do want and need help far outstrip DHR's capacity to serve them.

Several types of youths may fall under the category of "runaway". Some children are genuine "runaways", leaving home for reasons of their own which may be unknown to their parents; others leave home at the request of

their parents; and still others may leave because of abuse or neglect. Each of these groups needs different services. A survey directed in general toward "runaways" will not reveal these different populations or their respective needs for specialized services.

While objective research tends to underestimate the problem because it is a somewhat invisible behavior, subjective assessments may tend to overestimate the problem because of the emotion surrounding the issue. Good research should try to avoid both problems.

Table 1: Survey Results

Question	Number	Percent
1) How many people live in household?		
1-2	559	54.697
3-5	414	40.509
6-7	35	3.425
Over 7	7	0.685
No response	7	0.685
2) Does this include members other than immediate family?		
Yes	94	9.198
No	907	88.748
No response	21	2.055
3) Race of household		
White	853	83.464
Black	58	5.675
Hispanic	82	8.023
Asian	9	0.881
Am. Indian	4	0.391
Other	2	0.196
No response	14	1.370
4) Total family income before taxes		
Under 9,000	130	12.720
9,000-20,000	222	21.722
20,000-30,000	195	19.080
30,000-40,000	138	13.503
Over 40,000	256	25.049
No response	81	7.926
5) Do you have children 10-17 living in household?		
Yes	283	27.691
No	726	71.037
No response	13	1.272
6) Did a child leave home overnight without permission within the past 12 months?		
Yes	19	1.863
No	999	97.941
No response	4	0.392

Table 2: Results: Households Reporting Runaway

	Number	Percent
1) How many people live in household?		
1-2	2	10.526
3-5	16	84.211
6-7	1	5.263
2) Does this include member other than immediate family		
Yes	1	5.263
No	18	94.737
3) Race of household		
White	13	68.421
Black	1	5.263
Hispanic	4	21.053
Am. Indian	1	5.263
4) Family Income before taxes		
Under 9,000	1	5.263
9,000-20,000	4	21.053
20,000-30,000	5	26.316
30,000-40,000	2	10.526
Over 40,000	7	36.842
5) Number of families with children 10-17		
Yes	18	94.737
No	1	5.263
6) Relationship to runaway child		
Parent	14	73.684
Legal guardian	0	0.000
Other	2	10.526
No response	3	15.789
7) Sex of runaway		
Male	10	52.632
Female	7	36.842
No response	2	10.526

Households Reporting Runaways, Con't

	Number	Percent
8) Age of runaway		
10-13	3	15.789
14-17	11	57.895
Other	2	10.526
No response	3	15.789
9) Marital status of child's parents		
Single	0	0.000
Married	10	52.632
Divorced	5	26.316
Widowed	2	10.526
No response	2	10.526
10) How many times within the past 12 months has the child left home overnight without permission?		
Once	7	36.842
2-4 times	5	26.316
More than 6 times	5	26.316
11) Did the child return home?		
Yes	15	36.842
No	2	10.526
No response	2	10.526
12) Did you consider your child to have run away?		
Yes	8	42.105
No	8	42.105
Don't know	1	5.263
No response	2	10.526
13) Did your child use any of these services while away from home?		
Crisis hotline	0	0.000
School counselor	0	0.000
Emergency shelter	0	0.000
law enforcement service	0	0.000
Medical services	0	0.000
None	15	78.947
Other	1	5.263
No response	3	15.789

14) Did you use these services while your child was away?

Crisis hotline	0	0.000
Private/public counseling	2	10.526
Law enforcement services	5	26.316
None	9	47.368
Other	1	5.263
No response	2	10.526

15) How helpful were these services?

Not helpful	4	21.053
Somewhat	3	15.789
Very helpful	1	5.263
No response	11	57.895

16) How did the family find out about these services?

Referral from agency	1	5.263
Friend or relative	2	10.526
Telephone book	1	5.263
Other	1	5.263
No response	14	73.684

17) After the child returned home did your family use any of these services?

Family counseling	4	21.053
Legal services	1	5.263
None	10	52.632
No response	4	21.053

18) How helpful were these services?

Not helpful	1	5.263
Somewhat helpful	4	21.053
Very helpful	0	0.000
No response	14	73.684

I. First Cover Letter

December 19, 1984

Dear Householder:

At one time or another children may get upset about things and leave home without permission. No one knows how often this happens; or when it does, how children and their families get help. I am directing a University of Texas research team that is trying to estimate how many Texas children run away from home each year. If we succeed, state and education officials could do a better job helping those children and their families.

You are one of a small group of people we are asking to complete a short questionnaire. Even if you do not have children or none has left home without permission, we still need you to answer questions 1-5 (Part I). Your help is important!

We selected your household at random from all those in Texas. The answers you give are confidential; neither you nor your family will be identified in our research. Please complete the questionnaire and return it to me in the self-addressed, stamped envelope by January 14, 1985.

If you'd like to know more about this research, you may reach me at (512) 471-4962.

Thank you for helping the children of Texas.

Sincerely,

Professor Lodis Rhodes
RESEARCH DIRECTOR

I.1 Follow-up Cover Letter

January 31, 1985

Dear Householder:

Several weeks ago you received a short questionnaire in the mail. We have not received a reply from you as of this date. We need your assistance to complete our research.

You may recall that we are trying to figure out how many Texas children run away from home. Even if you have no children or none has left home, we still need your help. We need every questionnaire completed and returned to us.

Please take a few minutes now to complete and return the enclosed questionnaire. Remember that all answers are confidential. Neither you nor your family will be identified in our research.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely

Professor Lodis Rhodes
RESEARCH DIRECTOR

II. Survey Questionnaire

ID #____

Household Survey: Protective Services

PART I

1) How many people live in your household?

1) 1-2____
2) 3-5____
3) 6-7____
4) over 7____

2) Does this include members other than the immediate family?

1) Yes____
2) No____

3) What best describes the race of your household?

1) White____
2) Black____
3) Amer./Indian____
4) Hispanic____
5) Asian____
6) Other____

4) Which of these statements comes closest to your total family income before taxes for the last year?

1) under 9,000____
2) 9,000-20,000____
3) 20,000 30,000____
4) 30,000-40,000____
5) over 40,000____

5) During the last 12 months, have there been any children children 10-17 living in your household?

1) Yes____
2) No____

PART II

6) At one time or another children may get upset about things and may leave home. Within the past 12 months, in your household, did a child leave home overnight without permission?

1) Yes___
2) No___

7) What is your relationship with this child?

1) Parent___
2) Legal Guardian___
3) Other___

8) Is the child who left home without permission a boy or a girl?

1) Boy___
2) Girl___

9) What is his or her age?

1) 10-13___
2) 14-17___
3) Other___

10) What is the current marital status of the child's parents?

1) Single___
2) Married___
3) Divorced___
4) Separated___
5) Widowed___

11) Of the other adults in the household, which best describes their relationship to the children?

1) Natural father___
2) Natural mother___
3) Stepmother___
4) Stepfather___
5) Relatives___
6) Other___

12) How many times within the past 12 months has your child left home overnight without permission?

1) Once___
2) 2-4 times___
3) 4-6 times___
4) more than 6 times___

13) Did the child return home?

1) Yes____
2) No____

If answer is No, please explain the circumstances.

_____
_____
_____

14) If the child has not returned home, how long has he/she been gone?

1) Overnight____
2) over 24 hrs ____
3) over 2 days____

15) When your child left home, did you consider him/her to have run away?

1) Yes____
2) No____
3) Don't know____

16) To the best of your knowledge, while your child was away from home, did he/she use any of the following services?

1) Crisis Hotline____
2) School Counselor____
3) Emergency shelter____
4) Law enforcement services____
5) Medical serv.____
6) None____
7) Other____

17) How helpful was the service(s)?

1) Not helpful____
2) Somewhat helpful____
3) Very helpful____

18) While your child was away from home, did you or your family use any of the following services?

1) Crisis Hotline____
2) Private/ Public counseling services____
3) Law enforcement serv____
4) None____
5) Other____

19) How helpful was the service(s)?

1) Not helpful____
2) Somewhat helpful____
3) Very helpful____

20) How did your family find out about these services?

1) Referral from an agency____
2) Advertisement____
3) Friends or relatives____
4) Telephone book____
5) Other____

21) After your child returned home, did you or your family use any of the following services?

1) Family counseling____
2) Support groups____
3) Legal serv.____
4) Group home____
5) None____
6) Other____

22) How helpful was the service(s)?

1) Not helpful____
2) Somewhat helpful____
3) Very helpful____

23) Are there any other services you feel could help your family with a runaway child?

1) Yes____
2) No____

(Please describe if yes)

_____

_____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP. PLEASE RETURN BY JANUARY 14, 1985.

Notes

[1]The 95 percent confidence interval for the estimate is 91,292 - 92,078. The estimate was calculated using the following formula: C.I. = $1.96\sqrt{\frac{p \times (1-p)}{N}}$ were p = expected frequency of occurrence; n = sample size.

[2]Although it is not statistically permissible to calculate an estimate for families with children 10-17 when type of family is not the unit of analysis, we did out of curiosity. We used the ratio of families with children 10-17 who reported an absence/ families with children 10-17 in the respondent group (4.67 percent). We applied that percentage to the statewide figure for families with children 10-17 (1,461,601). The statewide estimate for families with children 10-17 is 68,256. We hasten to point out that we believe that both the statistical estimate of 91,000 and this calculation are based on a very narrow definition of "runaway". We, therefore, believe both numbers overestimate the number of children who run away from home and the familes who want and need help.